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**PRESS**

**The Tabloid Today**

"Today at 12 noon, Chicago gets its first new newspaper in 28 years," the ad boasted last week. That's the Windy City for you. Actually, the Chicago Tribune Co. had killed off its evening newspaper, Chicago's American (circulation: 436,893)—the weakest of the city's four dailies—and brought it back to life with a new face and form as Chicago Today.

The American was a standard-size newspaper, Today is tabloid-size. Though the tabloid format has had something of a disreputable past, the change was not made capriciously. For months the Tribune Co. had looked enviously across North Michigan Avenue at Field Enterprises' robust Sun-Times (circulation: 546,570), a morning tabloid that has over the years gradually been threatening the leadership of the powerful Tribune itself (circulation: 805,924). And when the Tribune Co. surveyed Sun-Times readers it discovered that what 40 per cent of them liked best about the Sun-Times was the compactness and convenience of the tabloid size. And so the Tribune Co. decided that a tabloid was just the format to catch the eye of younger readers who are presumably busier and are often commuters. At the same time, it would be a fresh choice for readers and advertisers in the competition with Field's standard-size evening newspaper, the Daily News (circulation: 461,357). "We want the young families making more than \$10,000 a year," says Today publisher Lloyd Wendt, "and we think we can get them."

**Pornographic:** The tabloid\* has been lowly regarded throughout much of American history. In Colonial days, the large page gained favor partly because the British taxed newspapers according to the number of pages. More recently, many publishers have avoided the tabloid because it connoted sensationalism. That reputation was mostly the legacy of the 1920s when three New York "tabs"—William Randolph Hearst's Daily Mirror, Joseph Patterson's Daily News and Bernarr Macfadden's Graphic (often called the "Pornographic")—vied with one another to titillate readers with the most lurid news of the day. In one notorious escapade, News photographer Tom Howard strapped a forbidden camera to his leg and walked into Sing Sing prison to photograph the execution of Mrs. Ruth Snyder, who, along with her lover, had been convicted of murdering her husband. The picture appeared on page one.

These days there are fewer than a dozen major city tabloids left (among them: the Post and the News in New York; Newsday on Long Island, the Record-American in Boston, The Philadelphia News, The Washington News).

\*From the French word *tabloide*, meaning tablet or capsule; from that it came to mean pressed in or condensed.

Many of them argue that they are now seeking respectability rather than scandal. "The screaming headlines meant something in the days when street sales were important," says Harold G. Kern, publisher of the Record-American (circulation: 433,372). "But now people get their headlines from radio and television. You don't pick up circulation with that sensational stuff." (The newspapers are also trying to downplay the name tabloid; Chicago Today refers to itself as a "compact journal"; the Sun-Times has called itself the "mini-paper.")

**Quality:** The qualities that the tabloids try to emphasize these days are their conciseness and their ease in handling. Newsday recently commissioned a survey of Long Island readers which indicated that though a majority continued to associate quality with a standard-size newspaper, some 60 per cent said they

**A long way from Ruth Snyder**

nonetheless preferred reading a tabloid. "I found it difficult to develop a feeling for the tabloid at first," says Newsday publisher Bill D. Moyers. "But now I am beginning to see the possibilities of a tabloid. For example, we have made our page one look more and more like a magazine cover."

As it changed its form, Chicago Today also tried to improve its content, elevating star feature writer Dorothy Storck to columnist and creating an additional column on the editorial page ("Our Reporter Sounds Off") to enable newsmen to express their personal opinions. But for the most part the editors and the writers remained the same. And certainly the newspaper's reverential attitude toward Chicago's political leaders remained unchanged. "Will you please keep in mind the fact that [Mayor Richard] Daley and [Gov. Richard B.] Ogilvie will be our guests at the inaugural breakfast," a memo from editor Luke P. Carroll admonished the staff before the first issue was out. "Let's not kick them in the teeth in our inaugural paper."

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